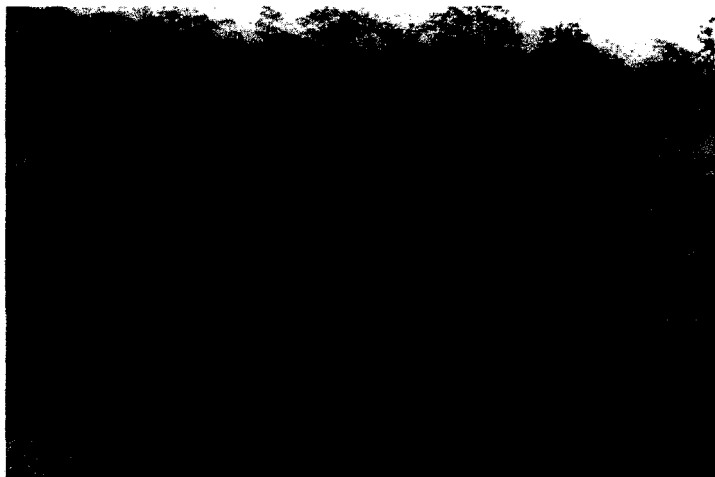




Artillery Support of Vietnamese

Lieutenant Colonel Harry O. Amos, *United States Army*



THE partnership of the Vietnamese infantry battalion commander and US advisor which has been a trademark in Vietnam for several years has been joined by a third member. The US artillery forward observer is now a familiar sight as Army Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units move out on operations.

At his immediate call are the fires of US artillery completing the firepower picture and providing to the ARVN commander a 24-hour a day fire support capability similar to that available to US commanders. This added support is not only making direct contributions to the success of the operations in which US artillery participates, but works to reinforce the ARVN programs of increasing the capabilities of their own artillery. Since arrival in Vietnam, over half the US artillery has supported Vietnamese forces.

Mission

The normal mission for US artillery in this role has been to reinforce the ARVN artillery of the maneuver force or the ARVN artillery in the general area of the operation. The reinforcing mission implies, of course, that there is an ARVN unit already performing direct support. This may not be the case with ARVN, at least in the way that we understand the direct support mission.

The ARVN unit may have no artillery, or the ARVN artillery unit may not wish or may not be able to maneuver because of dual missions. Or, finally, the situation may require airmobile artillery for which ARVN artillery has no capability at this time. Thus, when there is US artillery available for support, it usually does most of the things a direct support unit

would do. It provides liaison officers and forward observers who call directly to their own fire direction centers (FDC's) for fire; it displaces to support the plan of ground maneuver.

Support

In recognition of this gap between the desirable and actual performance, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) Artillery has developed a fifth mission called simply "support" to cover the situation of US artillery in support of Vietnamese or other Free World forces. It is defined as:

The mission of support when applied to an artillery unit requires the execution of fire missions in support of a specific force. The artillery unit remains under the command of the next higher artillery commander. This mission is commonly assigned to the artillery unit performing the functions of direct support with an allied force and, unless modified, implies the normal communications, liaison, positioning and fire planning of the direct support mission.

The normal distribution of forward observers and liaison officers to ARVN units has been one forward observer section per ARVN battalion and one liaison officer per major headquarters and maneuver control headquarters. The use of a single forward observer

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for an entire battalion is a realistic recognition of the relatively small size of the ARVN battalion which results in battalion operations often resembling that of the US company.

The battalion is usually divided into two elements—lead company or group and the remainder. The commander usually moves at the head of this second element accompanied by the US

port, the company commander requests the support and the battalion commander either authorizes or disapproves its use. If the battalion commander approves the request, the US forward observer is then asked to call for fire.

An adjustment of the fire may be accomplished by means of corrections relayed from the company commander



The artillery forward observer, US advisor, forward observer radio operator, and ARVN airborne battalion commander are a partnership in Operation Masher

advisor. When there is an assistant advisor, he is often with the lead company. The US forward observer is usually with the battalion commander and his US advisor. Rather than attacking targets on his own initiative or at the request of a platoon or company commander, the forward observer calls for artillery fire only when authorized by the battalion commander.

If the lead company needs fire sup-

port, the company commander requests the support and the battalion commander either authorizes or disapproves its use. If the battalion commander approves the request, the US forward observer is then asked to call for fire. An adjustment of the fire may be accomplished by means of corrections relayed from the company commander to the battalion commander, to the forward observer who then finally passes them to the FDC. It should be noted that similar procedures are observed for all forms of fire support. The battalion commander decides on their use, and their employment is directed from his location. The US advisor often identifies the target to the airborne forward air controller when US close air support is employed.

The US artillery liaison and forward observer are still defining their functions while working with ARVN units. ARVN's past lack of artillery support in the quantity and responsiveness to which US commanders are accustomed has made it impossible for the liaison officer and forward observer to slip automatically into the roles that are now so firmly established for them in the US Army. The functions actually performed include the standard ones of calling for fires; planning on-call concentrations to cover an advance; and planning, requesting, and triggering preparations on objectives.

Planning and Coordinating

When battalions halt for the night, the forward observer and liaison officers plot and fire in defensive concentrations around infantry positions. As a further guard against firing into friendly positions, both military and civilian, it is normal for the ARVN battalion commander to request the forward observer to transmit to the FDC or the combat support coordination center (CSCC) the four corners of a box or zone within which the local commander does not want artillery fire unless he calls for it. The area enclosed will not only include his own military positions, but also villages in the close vicinity where pacification efforts have begun.

Whether the mission is reinforcement or support, the US artillery unit will find itself involved in planning and coordinating fires when it supports ARVN. The specialized knowledge of those techniques possessed by US observers and liaison personnel is in large measure responsible for the effectiveness of our support of ARVN infantry. At the headquarters controlling the operation, the US artillery unit should be represented by its own

liaison officer, regardless of its specific mission.

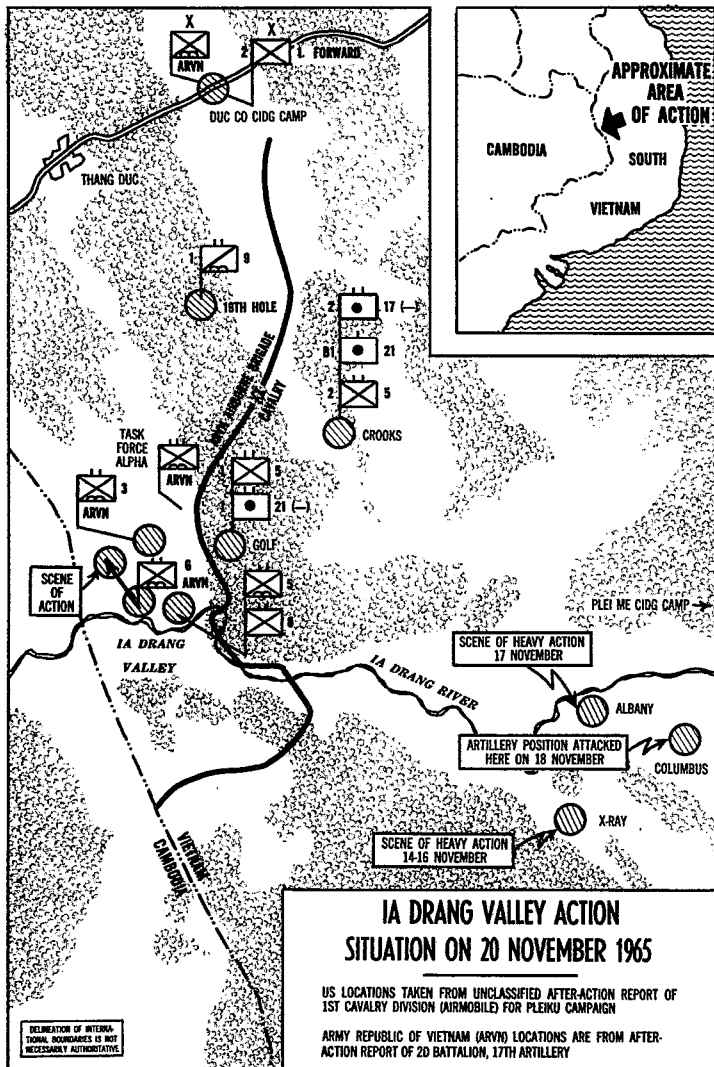
A recent Military Assistance Command Vietnam directive requires senior US advisors to establish a CSCC for all operations. This CSCC, established at the over-all command level of each operation—division, brigade, regiment, or battalion—becomes the focal point for the coordination of US artillery along with other means of fire support.

Control Agencies

The CSCC contains, among other elements, an artillery support element supervised by the senior ARVN artillery commander and assisted by his senior artillery advisor. Regardless of the specific mission being performed, the US artillery unit operating with ARVN will find it desirable to have its own liaison officer—or that of the senior artillery commander supporting the force—present in the CSCC. This not only facilitates fire planning, but speeds up the clearance of artillery fires.

The presence of large numbers of aircraft in a zone of operations, the rapid movement in all directions of friendly ground elements, and the dense civilian population in some areas have made the clearance of fires one of the major aspects of fire support coordination. When ARVN is supported, clearance is slowed somewhat by the language barrier and by multiple jurisdictions, each with its own authority to control fires into and over its area. On one operation, my battalion dealt with an ARVN unit, a US unit, a subsector headquarters, and a Civilian Irregulars Defense Group (CIDG) camp for clearance of fires from the same position.

Not only does the US unit need to acquire rapidly a facility for dealing



with these control agencies, it must also learn where it can and cannot deliver fire safely. Maps should be supplemented by aerial reconnaissance since a friendly village can spring up overnight. CSCC's organized on a territorial basis will do much to reduce the number of clearances an artillery unit must receive in order to fire. Nevertheless, the artillery's normal procedures by which it assures itself that it can fire safely are nowhere more important than when it supports Vietnamese forces.

Security Forces

When US artillery began to arrive in Vietnam, it was felt that artillery positions were especially vulnerable and would require a large infantry force around each position. This idea was reinforced by the early attitudes of ARVN commanders who, having lost a few 105-millimeter howitzers to Viet Cong assault and ambush, were accustomed to taking unusual precautions with their artillery.

When my battalion supported ARVN in its first few operations, it not only had US infantry attached for security, but was also assigned additional ARVN infantry for security. As operations continued, more use was made of ARVN security forces so that in recent operations US artillery units supporting ARVN were secured exclusively by ARVN forces.

On the whole, the language barrier is easily overcome. The advisors are already communicating in English with their counterparts. By staying with the advisor, the forward observer or liaison officer makes use of this link to transfer requests from Vietnamese to US artillery channels. After arriving at an understanding of what is desired, one American can then speak to another over the radio or the

telephone. The same is true in the CSCC's.

Other methods which have been used consist of placing an ARVN interpreter in the US FDC to translate for a Vietnamese observer or for an ARVN firing battery. Experience from joint Vietnamese-US service practice during lulls in operations shows that the English fluency of many ARVN observers is such that, by training with a particular US unit, they could easily learn to adjust fire over the radio in English.

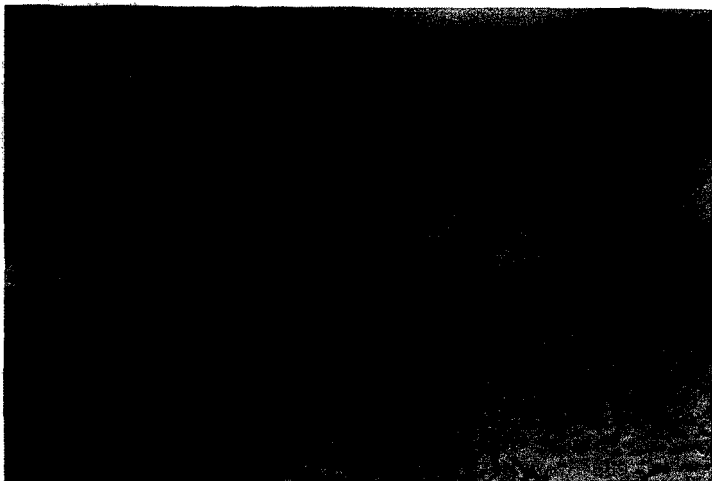
The experience of the 2d Battalion, 17th Artillery, in providing fire support to ARVN illustrates some of the typical problems to be encountered by a US artillery unit assigned this mission.

Phu Ly Bridge

One of the first operations involving US artillery support of ARVN occurred in October 1965. Elements of the 22d ARVN Division were given the mission of protecting the Phu Ly bridge along Highway 1 while it was under repair. A US battery provided support. The fire control arrangement consisted of having the ARVN stand in the US battery FDC and pass commands in Vietnamese to the reinforced ARVN artillery platoon located in the same position with the US battery. These commands were based on firing data developed by our FDC.

This arrangement was used for one day when, at the request of the senior ARVN artillery officer, the two FDC's were separated. A telephone was placed between them, and the normal relationship of reinforcing to reinforced artillery unit was observed. Battalion liaison officers and forward observers functioned at the bridge where they plotted defensive concentrations and fired them in conjunction

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Battery position of A Battery, 17th Artillery, at Tam Quan during Operation *Masher*



A 105-millimeter howitzer is loaded aboard a *CH-47*



Canal bank is unusual but workable position for C Battery, 2d Battalion, 17th Artillery



Photos courtesy of the author

The CH-47 proves its versatility

with the ARVN forward observers at the bridge. Requests for fire from the district chief were transmitted to the ARVN FDC. However, when US artillery is in position by itself, it is customary for it to answer these calls for fire from the local Vietnamese authorities in addition to any other mission.

In this operation, the artillery broke up an attack against the defenders of the bridge which was launched by an estimated reinforced company the first night the battery was in position. Two nights later, the artillery broke up a second attack. In both cases, US forward observers requested the firing of previously adjusted defensive concentrations. Here, the artillery was used to good effect in a role the ARVN understands well—the defense of a position. What did surprise them was having artillery placed closer than 220 yards from friendly positions. Watching this, one battalion commander said: "That's too close, but very good!"

Shiny Bayonet Operation

In the Shiny Bayonet operation northwest of Qui Nhon, the battalion reinforced the fires of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) direct support artillery and, at the same time, the fires of an ARVN division artillery. The battalion liaison officer and organic forward observers were sent to the ARVN regiment operating to the east of the US forces. During the operation, the battalion liaison officer functioned in the normal fashion, helping the battalion forward observers who were assigned to the regiment on the basis of one per battalion. Since no ARVN artillery was in range of the regiment, the battalion was, for all practical purposes, the direct support artillery for the ARVN regiment.

An ARVN liaison officer operated at the battalion FDC.

In this operation, the ARVN regiment had little or no contact. The artillery support took the form, primarily, of preparations on intermediate objectives and on-call concentrations fired ahead of the advance of friendly troops. While the ARVN were well pleased with the support received from US artillery, their use of it reflected their relative lack of experience with the integration of close artillery support into the plan of ground maneuver. In the initial phases of the operation, preparations were fired as much as two hours prior to crossing the line of departure. Concentrations to lead the advance were adjusted as much as 1,000 yards in front of friendly troops.

Ia Drang Valley

At the beginning of its participation in the Ia Drang Valley battle in November 1965, the ARVN airborne brigade had a task force of two battalions committed. Later, additional battalions and a second task force headquarters were committed, and the brigade headquarters established itself at the Duc Co Civilian Irregulars Defense Group camp. The 2d Battalion, 17th Artillery, using its headquarters and FDC and one firing battery provided—in effect—direct support to the airborne brigade while reinforcing the fires of 1st Air Cavalry direct support artillery.

The liaison officer remained with Task Force Alpha, and forward observer teams were assigned on the basis of one per battalion. The brigade did not attempt to coordinate or control fire support from its location some 12 miles from the operational area. Artillery fire planning and control were performed between the bat-

tation FDC and the liaison officer-advisor team in the operational area. The majority of the firing was done by one battery, but at times the fires of from one to three batteries of other US artillery were directed onto brigade targets through the battalion FDC.

This operation produced some spectacular results and an improved, although not perfect, ability to utilize artillery in close support of the plan of maneuver. At about noon on 20 November 1965, the 6th ARVN Airborne Battalion observed that, as the 3d Airborne Battalion maneuvered from west to east across its front, it was being followed by a reinforced enemy battalion. The task force commander ordered the 6th Battalion to assault the flank of the enemy force. When contact was made, artillery was requested by the lead company commander and relayed through the battalion commander to the US forward observer with him. The forward observer, in turn, passed the request and corrections to the battalion FDC.

Heavy Casualties

After adjustment, nearly 1,000 rounds were fired into an area approximately 500 yards in diameter in the space of just over one hour. Contact was broken about 1600, and over 80 bodies were counted prior to dark. Moving into the impact area the following morning, the body count went up to over 200 with an estimate that twice that many were actually killed. The artillery was given credit for doing 50 percent of the damage. Regardless of the exact number, it was clear that close support US artillery had provided the ARVN units involved with a most dramatic example of the value of artillery.

Two days later, two battalions

moved south across the Ia Drang River and utilized a preparation planned by the US forward observer and liaison officer to assault their first objective. Following immediately behind the preparation, they counted eight bodies in prepared defensive positions, and further up the hill found evidence leading to an estimate of some 20 additional casualties.

Operation 'Masher'

Operation *Masher* in January and February 1966 involved elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) operating west of Highway 1 and the ARVN airborne division east of the highway in the Bong Son area of northeast Binh Dinh Province. The battalion was in general support reinforcing the fires of the airborne division. The division operated its CSCC, and the battalion was represented there by its liaison officers. Additional liaison officers were provided to each of the two task force headquarters and a forward observer team was given to each of the battalions participating in the operation. When the division received the attachment of a troop of armored personnel carriers, it, too, was provided with a US forward observer.

In the early phases, artillery preparations were planned in the CSCC. Through it or directly from the battalion FDC, fire from medium and heavy US artillery positioned in the vicinity was directed onto targets in the airborne division's zone of operation. In the latter phase, when the battalion displaced about 10 miles north of the CSCC, the bulk of the artillery fire planning and fire support was handled directly between the US observer and liaison personnel and the battalion FDC.

Because of the many small-unit ac-

tions moving in different directions at the same time, civilian population, and large numbers of aircraft in the air, the clearance of all artillery fires was handled in the CSCC. On some missions, clearance took undesirably long periods of time.

At the start, an artillery preparation planned and fired on schedule was not exploited until two hours later. In another action, a task force of one battalion and an APC troop made excellent use of close support artillery in moving through a series of three objectives. Enemy casualties were apparent, and on the third objective, the enemy came out of his positions waving safe conduct passes as soon as the artillery preparation started.

US Artillery Support

On the night of 30 January 1966, an ARVN battalion perimeter was attacked from three directions by an estimated battalion. The US observer called for fire on and in the vicinity of previously adjusted defensive concentrations. Approximately 750 rounds from all of the US artillery available in the area were fired during a period of about 45 minutes. The artillery fire broke up the attack, and inspection of the area the following day revealed nine bodies and about twice that many fresh graves. A villager reported two days later that on the night the battalion was attacked, the Viet Cong pressed 400 villagers into service and evacuated 82 bodies from the area of the artillery fire.

Although not coordinated as smoothly as it might have been and, in hindsight, not employed as skillfully as one might have wished, US artillery support made a vital contribution to the success of this operation. The airborne task forces were able to eject three battalion-sized

units from heavily defended positions some of which had been in use by the Viet Cong for over 18 months.

As significant as the contribution it makes to a particular operation is the inherent ability of the US artillery unit to provide a live demonstration of the potential of artillery. This practical example of artillery as an integral part of the ground plan employed in quantities envisioned by US doctrine is making an important contribution to programs aimed at increasing the capability of ARVN artillery itself.

Artillery Organization

At present, the artillery with an ARVN infantry division consists of two 105-millimeter howitzer battalions. There are several 155-millimeter howitzer battalions within ARVN which serve as corps artillery. This artillery force provides for support of:

- ARVN search and destroy and defensive operations.
- Static defense of the sector and subsector where the artillery is located.
- Regional and popular force operations.

The latter two often are under the control of the sector commander rather than the ARVN division commander.

The artillery organization cited is a minimal force considering the level of enemy activity and the immense areas to be controlled. Also, traditional methods of employment tend to limit further the amount of artillery available to support a particular operation.

The reluctance to maneuver artillery goes hand in hand with an observer and liaison organization which is weak by US standards. ARVN commanders also hesitate to give their artillerymen their proper place on the

team. Although firing battery and gunnery procedures are generally sound, and gun crews are well trained and rapid in response, artillery tactics and techniques at battery level and above are below US standards. As a result, there are many operations where the artillery potential is not fully realized.

Recently, several steps have been taken by the Vietnamese to increase the capability of their artillery. Additional numbers of officer forward observers are being trained. A basic body of doctrine for ARVN artillery is also being developed.

The absence of sufficient artillery to support many operations has forced a reliance on tactical air for fire support of the infantry battalion. The significant results obtained from the employment of air account for a tendency on the part of ARVN commanders and some US advisors to use air support only, even when both artillery and air are available and both might be used to good advantage.

US artillery units have demonstrated that effective support can be given Vietnamese forces through the standard observer and liaison organization.

Operations to date have provided

ARVN with support which frequently proved to be the margin of success. At the same time, the ARVN has been introduced to the full potential of artillery. Where the same two units have been able to work together during more than one operation, the quality of the support has improved as all concerned became better acquainted.

There will be a continuing mission for US artillery in support of Vietnamese forces in order to provide them with a firepower edge similar to that enjoyed by US forces. The procedures to date, which are simply an adaptation to a particular situation of accepted doctrine, provide a firm basis for future support. As time goes on, this should take the form of more US forward observers—perhaps two per battalion—the integration of US and ARVN forward observers, more massing of US and ARVN batteries on targets, and an expanded role for ARVN artillery in the war of maneuver.

Most US artillery units in Vietnam can expect to support Vietnamese forces at one time or another. They will find themselves performing the dual role of fire support agency and instructor by example. The experience will be a rewarding one.

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